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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

9 April 1951

SUBJECT: NIE-32: THE COMMUNIST MILITARY POSITION IN KOREA
AND ITS EFFECT ON SINO-SOVIET COURSES OF ACTION
IN THE FAR EAST
(Draft for consideration of the Board)

THE PROBLEM

To assess the Communist military position in Korea
and probable Sino-Soviet courses of action with respect
to Korea.

CONCLUSIONS

1. We believe that the Chinese Communist and their
North Korean allies, are now incapable of defeating the UN
unless they are substantially reinforced by sea and air
power. Despite heavy losses in men and materiel, however,
they are probably capable of fighting a long war of at-
trition against UN forces of approximately the same
strength as those now in Korea.

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2. We consider it most unlikely that the Communists will resort to negotiations with the UN; available evidence indicates, on the contrary, that the Chinese Communists, with Soviet approval, intend to continue military operations indefinitely.

3. Their object in fighting an indecisive war might be to prolong the economic strain and military diversion they may believe the Korea war represents for the United States and the West. A more important purpose might be to increase the disposition among some of the UN allies to end the fighting in Korea even in the face of radical concessions to the Communists.

4. In order to accomplish these purposes the Chinese Communists might attempt to hold a line in Korea, but could also withdraw into Manchuria where they would presumably not be attacked. In this event they could probably take ample time to prepare for a new offensive which they could launch at a time of their own choosing. In the meanwhile, UN forces would still have to be maintained in Korea probably to the detriment of UN willingness to continue the war.

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5. If the USSR chose to intervene directly and openly in Korea, we believe that it could force a withdrawal of UN forces. We do not believe, however, that the USSR would actually intervene openly unless and until it had decided, on the basis of the world situation in general, that war with the US was imminent and unavoidable.

6. We believe, on the basis of such evidence as is available, that the scale of Soviet intervention in Korea will increase, particularly if the Chinese Communists suffer more reverses, but that the intervention will remain in a form that is at least semi-covert and can be disavowed by the USSR in order to avoid giving any clear-cut provocation to the US for direct attacks on the USSR.

7. If the USSR were unwilling to accept the risk of war involved in disguised intervention, it might urge the Chinese Communists to open negotiations, but we believe that it would not accept such a solution without having first exploited the possibilities of limited intervention.

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moving toward Manchuria from China proper, where there are some 2,488,000 Field Force and Military District troops.

10. Chinese equipment losses, mainly small arms and mortars, have been slight, and the Chinese have fairly large reserve stocks in Manchuria. In addition, current production from the Mukden arsenal is believed sufficient to meet a major part of Chinese Communist requirements in Korea for small arms and ammunition. North Korean forces, dependant almost entirely on the USSR for equipment, lost a very substantial portion of their armament during their retreat in September 1950. Although the North Korean Army is now reequipped with Soviet weapons, replacement of heavy materiel such as tanks and artillery apparently has not kept up with attrition. The Soviet Union possesses in the Far East supplies adequate, if the Kremlin should choose to release them, for a greatly increased program of support to Communist forces in Korea.

11. UN forces have destroyed or damaged approximately 225 Communist aircraft, but most of this damage was inflicted early in the war before the North Korean air force withdrew to Manchuria. Since that time the Communists have not committed their air potential, which is gradually increasing with Soviet direction and technical assistance. The Chinese

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Communist and North Korean air forces in Korea are estimated to have available now a combined strength of approximately 160 aircraft of fighter, ground attack, light bomber and transport types. In addition the Chinese Communists and North Koreans are holding in reserve approximately 760 aircraft of all types. If, however, the combined North Korean-Chinese Communist air force were committed to sustained operations in support of ground troops or to cover lines of communications, combat and maintenance attrition would reduce its combat effectiveness to an insignificant level within a short time, probably about a week.

12. In view of their remaining combat strength and large reserves, Chinese Communist forces in Korea are probably not appreciably weaker than they were at the time of Chinese intervention. So long as UN forces retain air supremacy, however, the Communists will have considerable difficulty in supplying an army any larger than the present force. We believe, therefore, that the Communist forces in Korea, unless substantially reinforced by air and sea power, are incapable of driving UN forces from Korea. They have, however, a potential for local offensives based on massed manpower and are probably capable of retaining control of a

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substantial part of North Korea, and fighting an almost indefinite war of attrition against forces approximately as large and effective as the UN forces at present in Korea.

PROBABLE CHINESE COMMUNIST INTENTIONS WITH RESPECT TO KOREA

13. The Chinese diplomatic position is such that they can still propose a peaceful settlement with the UN or "accept" certain offers already made by the UN and not formally withdrawn. The possibility cannot be overlooked, therefore, that the North Koreans or the Chinese Communists might at any time reverse their present policy and begin negotiations. Their maximum objective might be to obtain a favorable settlement with respect to such major issues as US protection of Taiwan, Chinese Communist admission to the UN, and ultimate control of a unified Korea. Their minimum objective might involve gaining time, developing favorable propaganda, and causing dissension among the US and its allies. We do not believe, however, that the Chinese Communists are now willing or are likely to become willing to depart from their previously announced terms for a negotiated Korean settlement. They originally considered the Korean campaign to be important enough to intervene despite what they plainly considered a grave risk of US retaliation

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against China proper. They probably could not now "withdraw" their "volunteer" troops from Korea without unacceptable loss of face or in view of their reiterated statements that Korea must be fully "liberated". Even to agree to the status quo ante on balance, therefore we believe that Peiping will continue to prosecute the war, despite Chinese losses to date, the further losses that would be incurred if the fighting continues, and the increasing strain on China's domestic economy that would be involved.

14. Apart from immediate considerations involving its own prestige and security, the Chinese Communist government might consider prolonged prosecution of the war desirable on grounds of the economic strain and military diversion it may be considered to represent for the West, and, more importantly, the opportunities it presents for magnifying the sentiment among some of the UN allies for bringing the Korean war to an end despite important concessions to the Communists that might have to be made. To achieve this purpose, the Chinese Communists could attempt to hold a line on the Korean peninsula, but could also withdraw into Manchuria. If the UN then refrained from attacking them on Chinese territory, they could prepare for a new Korean offensive at a time of their own choosing. In the meanwhile, the UN would be con-

pelled to maintain forces in Korea under circumstances which would still involve a major military commitment and would probably weaken the will of the UN to continue the war, and might cause increased dissension between the US and its allies.

PROBABLE SOVIET INTENTIONS WITH RESPECT TO KOREA

15. If the Kremlin, chose to intervene directly and openly in Korea, Soviet forces in the Far East are capable of mounting a large-scale ground, sea, and air campaign that would undoubtedly force a withdrawal of UN forces. If the USSR intervened in Korea on such a scale, however, the Kremlin would have to be fully prepared for the immediate beginning of general hostilities with the US. On balance, we believe that the USSR would be unlikely to intervene openly and directly in Korea unless and until it had decided, on the basis of the world situation in general, that war with the US was imminent and unavoidable. Operations in Korea would not then represent the primary Soviet effort, although the Kremlin would probably attempt, as one of its opening campaigns, to destroy UN forces deployed there.

16. The Kremlin's stake in the Korean war, however, is as great, if not greater, than China's, and the Kremlin prob-

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ably will make strenuous efforts to prevent a Communist defeat in Korea. Soviet propaganda, culminating in a statement by Stalin himself, has never varied from the line that an "imperialist" defeat is inevitable. This prediction has always been in general terms, however, and to date, Soviet leaders have scrupulously refrained from any form of overt intervention in the Korean war or definitive Soviet commitment. Instead they have confined themselves to furnishing moral, diplomatic, and materiel support to the North Koreans and Chinese Communists. Apparently the Kremlin has preferred to see the Korean campaign go on inconclusively for a long time rather than to risk precipitating global war by intervening with sufficient force to insure an early and decisive victory. If, however, the campaign appeared about to end in failure as a result of insufficient Soviet support, it is conceivable that the strain on Sino-Soviet relations might become so great that the USSR would have to choose between sharply increased intervention or abandonment of its whole strategic position in the Far East. At this point, and there is no reliable evidence as to when it might be reached, the USSR might feel compelled to accept greatly increased risks of precipitating general war with the US in order to

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preserve its alliance with China, protect its position in the Far East, and restore Soviet prestige in general.

17. If the Kremlin is moved by such considerations it probably has already decided that it is necessary to provide increased assistance to the Communist forces in Korea. It is not clear what form such increased Soviet participation in Korea may take. Because the Chinese and Koreans lack equipment rather than manpower, the USSR might simply furnish heavy artillery and tanks, and augment the Chinese-North Korean air force with Soviet planes, flown by "volunteer" pilots, possibly not of Soviet nationality. Such support might possibly be augmented by naval aid in the form of submarine and mine warfare. The Kremlin might provide such support only sparingly, in an effort to prolong the present stalemate, or at least to prevent a Communist defeat, or it might provide support on a scale sufficient to attempt to force the UN to withdraw from Korea.

18. We have already observed indications of intensive preparations for increased Communist air activity in Manchuria and Korea, and the evident need for increased air support to the Communist forces in Korea suggests that a new phase of air activity is about to begin, probably in-

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volving participation of Soviet planes and personnel. It would be logical for North Korean and Chinese Communist elements to operate in forward areas and for Soviet air elements, if they intervened in the fighting, to operate behind the front lines. Soviet air intervention on any scale that would not provoke UN retaliation against the USSR, however, would not be decisive in the Korean operation, and could not be undertaken without risk of very serious losses of Communist aircraft. Soviet participation, therefore, would probably have to go beyond an air commitment, perhaps to the point of including the participation of Soviet-bloc "volunteer" troops, serving either within existing Chinese or Korean units or in an "international" army, and possibly naval units. The level of Soviet participation in the Korean fighting, if it were increased but remained short of open intervention, might be built up gradually as Soviet leaders assess US acceptance of the previous increment and US inability or unwillingness to force a showdown with the USSR on the issue of covert or "volunteer" Soviet participation. The Kremlin would rely heavily on the reluctance of the US and its allies to attack the USSR directly, whatever the provocation in Korea. We believe, in view of all these considerations, that the scale of Soviet intervention in

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Korea will increase, particularly if the Chinese Communists suffer more reverses, but that the intervention will remain in a form that is at least semi-covert and can be disavowed by the USSR in order to avoid giving any clear-cut provocation to the US.

19. Although the most likely course of Soviet action at present is a more effective commitment in support of continuing Chinese Communist and North Korean operations, it is possible that the Kremlin is unwilling to accept the risks involved or would prefer to husband Soviet resources. In such an event the USSR might encourage or acquiesce in Chinese Communist or North Korean efforts to obtain the best terms available in a negotiated settlement. Nevertheless, on the basis of indications now available, and in view of the fact that the continued existence of Manchuria as a secure base obviates the necessity for any decisive diplomatic action on the part of the North Koreans or Chinese, we believe that the USSR would not accept such a solution without first having exploited the possibilities of intervening in Korea more effectively, while still preserving the fiction of official Soviet aloofness from the conflict.

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